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FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9372

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0773

RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 1593

RHMFIASS/39ABG INCIRLIK AB TU PRIORITY

RHMFIASS/425ABS IZMIR TU//CC// PRIORITY

RHMFIASS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RHMFIASS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//USDP:PDUSDP/ISA:EUR/ISA:NESA/DSCA// PRIORITY

RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 005922

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/06/2016

TAGS: PGOV MARR MOPS PTER TU

SUBJECT: TALK TOUGH FROM TURKEY'S GENERALS: READING BETWEEN THE LINES

REF: A. ANKARA 05735

1B. ANKARA 05610

1C. ANKARA 05723

1D. ANKARA 05582

Classified By: DCM NANCY MCEDOWNEY FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D).

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Summary  
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11. (C) In a carefully crafted series of public messages, Turkey's senior military and President Sezer have warned of imminent danger to the nation's secular order, clearly pointing at the pro-Islam government of PM Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP). The generals' strident warnings set off a firestorm of debate about the nature of "fundamentalism" and the role of the military in political life. The speeches specifically targeted recent EU criticism of the military's prominent political role as well as domestic criticism embodied in a recent study on civil-military relations published by a respected Turkish NGO. While conspiracy theories about the Generals' ulterior motives have proliferated wildly, most experienced analysts have ascribed four major objectives, as the real intended messages of the rhetoric. First, the low key days of CHOD Hilmil Ozkok are over; the military is back and remains a political player. Second, the military opposes the election of Erdogan to the presidency next May, which they believe would further tilt the political balance in favor of Islamic "fundamentalists." Third, the military is wary that the AKP is filling state institutions, including the National Police, with devote cadres. And fourth, EU membership should not come at the price of Turkey's national identity and pride.

12. (C) While the Turkish Armed Forces has its cheering section among the divided secular establishment and still enjoys the highest public confidence of any national institution, the generals' rhetoric may have unintended consequences. Erdogan may now feel additional incentive to seek the Presidency so as not to be seen to be backing down under military pressure. At the same time, many argue that the military's show of strength is not the way to enhance democracy for today's Turkey and could, ironically, prompt the undecided to vote for AKP. While a few observers have compared the present tensions to the "post-modern coup,"

which toppled the coalition government of pro-Islam PM Erbakan in 1997, most believe that the current situation is far less volatile, at least so far. End Summary

¶13. (C) The most obvious effect of a series of strident addresses by senior commanders at Turkey's war colleges -- culminating in CHOD Yasar Buyukanit's televised October 2 speech in Istanbul -- has been to demonstrate to the public and government that the days of former defense chief Hilmi Ozkok, with his low-key approach, are over. Ozkok's low profile in the face of significant EU-ordered reforms curbing the military's political power caused frustration in the officer corps. Buyukanit and his service chiefs are making clear that the armed forces remain a major player and will speak out in defense of the secular nature of the republic founded by Ataturk, calling the perceived threats by their names.

¶14. (C) The public pronouncements of the generals and President Sezer together are a clear warning to the AKP that it should not seek to elect Erdogan to the Presidency when Sezer's term ends in May 2007. Sezer warned against any development that would fundamentally alter the secular-religious balance of power and the generals made clear this would be unacceptable. By pointedly criticizing an NGO report on civil-military relations, to which academics from the Turkish National Police (TNP) Academy contributed, Buyukanit raised a warning flag against the Erdogan government's perceived efforts to place "fundamentalists" in key positions in the state bureaucracy, long a secular stronghold. In particular, the secular establishment believes that Erdogan has infiltrated the TNP with religious conservatives associated with the movement of U.S.-based cleric Fetullah Gulen.

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¶15. (C) The military accepted a number of reforms, including diminishment of its role on the National Security Council, in order to advance Turkey's EU bid. Despite these sacrifices, Buyukanit sees the military's role still under attack -- from EU bureaucrats who, in his view, do not understand Turkey's unique history and, most worrisomely, from internal debate and criticism emboldened by the reforms. This is personal for Buyukanit in a way it never was for his predecessor. In the aftermath of the Semdinli incident, Buyukanit himself was criticized and threatened with prosecution for his alleged role in the affair.

¶16. (C) Several commentators have looked for parallels between the present civil-military relations and the situation which obtained in February 1997, when military pressure, exercised through the then-powerful NSC, caused the government coalition led by the Islamist Welfare Party (an AKP predecessor) under then-Prime Minister Erbakan to resign in what has been termed a "post-modern coup." They point out some parallels to 1997, featuring increasing tensions between the military and an Islamist-dominated government seen as seeking to promote religious values in government institutions.

¶17. (C) However, most observers here agree that there are more differences than similarities between the situations in 1997 and 2006. PM Erdogan has demonstrated greater flexibility and pragmatism than his ideological forebear Erbakan. Erbakan had created a more militant environment where local authorities with strong Islamist convictions were encouraged to bring religion into government. Just before the events of February 1997, the Islamist mayor of the Ankara suburb of Sincan organized a "Jerusalem Day," featuring Iranian ambassador (now Iranian Foreign Minister) Mottaki publicly calling for stronger religious law in Turkey. The military rolled forty tanks "returning from maneuvers" through Sincan a short time later to express its displeasure. At the same time, then-President Demirel sided with the military in 1997 to topple a weak coalition government. Current President

Sezer does not have that stature and Erdogan's AKP single-party government is relatively strong in the face of a divided and feckless opposition. In addition, few are interested in jeopardizing a Turkish economy that is far healthier than in the late 1990s.

¶8. (C) The military has always been a key player here and we don't expect that to change. However, the generals' stridency risks unintended consequences. First, Erdogan may now have additional incentive to seek the presidency or risk being seen as backing down in the face of an open military challenge. Second, many pro-military members of the secular elite have misgivings about the generals' political comments, which they see as a step backward for the democratic process here, particularly at this key moment in Turkey's EU bid. However this plays out, it is certain that the months preceding the May 2007 presidential stakes will see increased tensions.

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